

A Tale of Blue Boxers

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Rating: Let's say a suggestive PG -- how risqué can a story about cloth be? Anyone who believes that the story deserves a higher rating should probably get her own imagination under control. It is not the author's intention to drag her readers down into the gutter, and she will not be held responsible for readers who mistakenly slip there on their own.

Timeline: Soon after the fourth season.

Author's notes: This is for you, Merel. You had to dare me, didn't you? Thanks also to my beta readers, who went above and beyond to help me get this ready so quickly.

All right. A little explanation is in order here. Many of you may have been following the smkfanfic thread about Lee's clothing, starting with the blue boxers and leading into a hundred delicious directions from there. That thread was the basis of this story. My dear friend Merel and I were chatting about the discussion, and somehow she dared me to write a story about it, the catch being that the story was to be from the POV of the blue boxers themselves. Quite a challenge to an as-yet-unposted author! When the whole thing escalated to a "double dare", I knew I had to take up the gauntlet. The following little escapade is the result. It's being posted to this site at the urging of one of my beta readers, who is of the opinion that what she had in her imagination after reading it "woulda been illegal in several states".

This was never planned as a holiday presentation (truth be told, it was never planned at all - it just sort of happened) but the time seems right to send it out with my wishes that each and everyone of you have a wonderful holiday season and a festive New Year.

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It's generally taken for granted that the garments in closets, in dresser drawers, and on shelves have but a single purpose -- to cover their owner -- but that is far from the whole truth. Come with us for a short trip around the wardrobe of a certain gentleman in the Georgetown area of our nation's capital. Oh! So sorry! We almost forgot to introduce ourselves; we're the boxer family, specifically the blue boxers, and we are, without a doubt, the most important members of the wardrobe in question.

This particular man has, for the last 10-15 years, had a more extensive wardrobe than most, a reflection, no doubt, of the unusual situations he frequently finds himself in during the course of a

"normal" workweek. In his closets and dresser drawers at the moment, you'll find the expected business attire, of course, but in this case it ranges unexpectedly from expensively tailored suits to handsome sports jackets, shirts, and slacks to threadbare coveralls. There are always casual outfits for tennis, golfing, sailing, hiking -- just about any sporting activity you could think to name - - but there are also garments intended for a more formal type of entertainment, the type that might be at home in Monte Carlo or at a formal embassy party. In other words, the man and his wardrobe are ready for any situation.

Many of the garments in this apartment serve a functional purpose, like the all-black commando outfit that hangs near the back of the bedroom closet. Some ensure the proper first impression, a primary function of the series of smartly-tailored suits and the crisp white dress shirts hanging next to them. Some apparel is intended to provide protection, like the trench coat hanging in the hall closet or the bullet-proof vest lying on its shelf or, in its own way, the *gi* he wears when honing his karate and tae kwon do skills. Some of the clothes attract attention without really trying, like the well-worn, tight-fitting jeans, neatly folded and lying on the bedroom closet shelf, while other articles were purchased with the express purpose of showing off the wearer at his best. The jet-black tuxedo with its cummerbund and the crisp white dress shirt, with its pleated front and obsidian studs and cufflinks, come to mind in this category.

As with most men, this one has a few quirks about his wardrobe. Some members of the male species swear by their lucky socks; others will wear only certain colors; still others wouldn't be caught dead in anything plaid. This man's peculiarity was less obvious to the outside world, though, and it's where we come in. This man wears us, blue boxers, or he wears nothing at all.

Now a little-known fact concerning every person's wardrobe is that none of us like to spend all our time staring at the inside of a darkened closet or suffocating in a dresser drawer, where other wardrobe members are jammed in with you like sardines in a tin. And so, to pass the time in an otherwise rather boring existence, the various articles of clothing which have most recently been out in the "real world" return to their storage places with tales of the things they have seen, the places they have been, and the experiences they have had.

(And, if we may insert our unsolicited opinion here, some of those pieces have an arrogance that drives the rest of the wardrobe to distraction. No one else in the closet wants to listen to the never-ending name-dropping of the tuxedos, but we've not yet found a way to shut the obnoxious things up. It's a relief when they're taken from the closet, but we all know that we're in for it more than ever when they return with a new set of tall tales.)

Outerwear, of course, usually has the most to tell. The suit jackets, sweaters, and coats are in the best position to see what is going on, for their view of the world is largely unobstructed. In this particular wardrobe over the past years, outerwear has seen some pretty interesting things. The old trench coat had quite a tale to tell when it was hung, almost reverently, in its new position at the back of the closet a few years ago, and it solemnly indulged its neighbor garments with an exciting tale of chases, fights, and, finally, an exchange of gunfire that resulted in the old coat's injury: two neat holes, one where the bullet entered the front of the left sleeve, another where it

exited through the back of the same sleeve, miraculously without touching the owner, who was wearing the coat at the time.

The old coat won a great deal of respect by returning home to the closet with such dignity after this adventure. All the garments gave a collective shudder when they thought of other, less lucky former neighbors in the closet, in the dresser, and on the shelves, who were selected one day, never to return. Often, such occurrences are followed by the apparel owner's increased presence in the apartment for a few days, sometimes after an absence of several days. He always seems to be a bit out of sorts on these occasions. He spends more time in bed or lying on the couch, usually dressed in the old sweats or the bathrobe. And us, of course. And he mutters under his breath or even talks to the walls about how he hates "hospitals". We garments don't completely understand the meaning of all this, but we sincerely believe that, on these occasions, he must be joining us in mourning the loss of a faithful fabric friend.

If you remember, earlier we boxers claimed our rightful place as the most important members of this wardrobe. We must force our modesty aside for now, as we feel compelled to explain the reasons that this is true.

First and foremost, WE are the articles of clothing who know the man the best. We're the first thing he puts on each morning and the last thing removed each evening. Oh, yes, we can hear you now, "But he always has on a shirt, or socks, or slacks of some sort, and they seem MUCH more important than some plain old boxers." You just don't understand. The blue boxers are family, and this family stays together. Those other classes of clothes are similar but they're just not cut from the same cloth, and they're as likely as not to be feuding.

There've been general examples of this -- the dress shirts wouldn't be caught dead talking with the T-shirts, for instance, and neither group is crazy about the sport shirts -- but mostly we remember a few specific instances when a new garment was, for one reason or another, totally snubbed by its peers. Not that we really blamed them for being upset, you understand; that one striped shirt was a bit over the top, and the yellow sweater vest never seemed to fit in. Neither did the sports coat with the white, nubby-looking things all over it, or the blue coat with the yellow braid. As we think of it, there were several coats and jackets, and even a few sweaters that never seemed to really fit in with the crowd. And then there were the double-breasted suits. The sports coats and newer suits never could stand any of the lot, although, in that case, we really think they were being too hard on the older fashion. Guess it was a "love it or hate it" sort of thing.

Of course, we boxers are the most concealed pieces in the man's wardrobe, which earns us a lot of scorn from most of the other garments. They say that we're purely functional, with no redeeming qualities, but we know that we've been more places and we've heard and seen more things (no, not THAT -- we're the conservative sort; we'd never talk about THAT) than those high-and-mighty duds ever imagined.

As we said before, we're the ones who are with the man everywhere he goes. Well, nearly everywhere. We still don't understand why, when he reaches for the worn blue denim jeans or some

of those old sweatpants, we are invariably left behind. Of course, we've seen him in the jeans once or twice, before he remembered to close the drawer where we live, and it looks like it might be awfully uncomfortable, trying to fit between the faded blue fabric and the skin we're so familiar with. Maybe it was a good thing that he's never asked us to try.

And every now and then, we've been known to strike off on our own. Those snobby argyle socks are always rubbing it in that THEY'VE traveled through the fourth dimension of laundry and that THEY'VE seen more different washers and have visited with more different wardrobes than the rest of us put together. Well, maybe they're right about that, but they're not the only ones who've made a trip through the fourth dimension. We remember winding up in the middle of a load of soft, silky undergarments that belonged to a particular woman. But that was after the big change, so maybe it wasn't really dimensional travel after all, but they don't need to know that, do they?

Enough digressing. The other reason that we boxers are supreme among the wardrobe is that, from our place snuggled rather intimately right up next to him, we're privy to a lot of the man's secrets. (No, no, no! There you go again! Not THOSE secrets! We've already made it quite clear that we'll not divulge any confidential information of that ilk, so just quit trying to trick us into doing so. Now, if you'll be so kind as to allow us to continue. <hrumph!>) Only the boxer family knows it all. Oh, the stories we could tell, if we were of a coarser weave. Fortunately, we're of a more refined cut and know when to keep our secrets.

There was, however, one other well-loved garment that knew at least as many secrets as we -- the thick brown terry bathrobe.

The old bathrobe was a mystery to the rest of us. It was always there when the man entertained the females who came to our apartment so often, at least until a year or two ago, either hanging on its hook, from which it could see all that had happened, or draped casually across a chair near the man's bed. We boxers, of course, were the first to realize that he was thinking of entertaining, but only the bathrobe really knew what happened when he did so. The rest of us only knew that, after we had been shed and tossed aside, often quite frantically and with minor injuries such as small tears or buttons ripped from their rightful places, strange sounds would arise from the darkened bedroom. When the man arose again, he always reached for the bathrobe, but the venerable old garment never shared its secrets with us. A shame, really. We all yearned to know what our senior member had seen in its lifetime. Even after the old bathrobe was retired several months ago, it never let anything slip. And the replacement isn't any more forthcoming. It must be a code of ethics or something, much like our reticence to talk about certain subjects.

For a long time the man's life, while never what you could call routine or boring, was without direction. His active social life didn't seem to satisfy him, or maybe he just liked a LOT of variety in his female companions. It was as though he was always looking for something that eluded him. Not that we ever got to know any of the women well; we were there with the others, discarded hastily shortly after one of them arrived.

There are reminders of a few of those female companions, though. One was the white dress shirt with the hideously obvious red stain on its collar. What was it that the man called it? Did he say "plastique"? Funny, it always looked like lipstick to the other shirts, many of whom were familiar with that particular type of blemish.

For a very long time, the favorites among the other garments were the matching pair of thick terry robes who proudly announced their names to the world. One was called "Lee", the old favorite we told you about earlier, and its mate was "She". They arrived in the closet at the same time, and we all thought that they were really meant for each other, as perfectly matched as the knit gloves on the shelf in the hall closet, next to the extra scarves. "Lee" and "She" were cut from the same warm cocoa-brown terrycloth, and they proclaimed their names in large, sky-blue embroidered letters. "She" wasn't like the rest of us, meant primarily for the man's use. Instead, "She" served as a temporary covering for many of the female companions after they'd been entertained. But "She" never seemed to mind, because it meant being near "Lee", and that was what mattered most to the soft, warm garment.

We all remember the altercation in the closet the day after one of the man's women brought in that cheap, pink polyester satin "Crystal". "She" had been ignored that night, and was distraught when "Lee" took up with that hussy. "She" was disconsolate on the few occasions that "Crystal" was chosen instead, but we all knew it wouldn't last long.

And it didn't. It's almost comical how that misfit "Crystal" wound up stored with the old coat we told you about earlier. Remember? The one who retired from service after being wounded? We never thought that it would work out. What on earth would a tawdry pink satin robe have in common with a rough old coat? Still, the cheap pink robe was enchanted by the prestige the old trench coat held with the remainder of the wardrobe, and the old garment's wrinkles seemed to disappear the day "Crystal" arrived, so we supposed that whatever was going on between the two of them would just as well stay their business. "She" was back with "Lee" in a matter of days, but, as we mentioned above, they were reunited when "Lee" was replaced.

The man changed the women "She" and "Lee" met so often as often as he changed us boxers, so everyone in the wardrobe was surprised to hear a new voice, a sweetly raspy woman's voice, not just once or twice, but over and over again. At first, the man had acted quite put out when she was around, even though we were right there the first time he met her, nearly four years ago, and we can vouch that it was his idea for her to board the train with a package for the man in the red hat.

This new woman was something of a mystery, at least to the boxer family. We always had at least a quick glimpse of his other women friends before we were so rudely ripped off and thrown across the room, but we never saw this one, because we always remained securely in place. He always kind of distanced himself from her; it was the last reaction we would have expected from him, especially if the woman was as beautiful as the jackets and shirts described. We did see her once, for a brief moment, a few months after we first heard her voice, but the situation was completely different from what we'd come to expect. The man had been trying on slacks, an experience which is, by the way, very disconcerting and disorienting for us. Covered up -- uncovered -- covered up --

uncovered. Quite dizzying, really, but of course, he never gave a thought to our discomfort, did he? People are like that; all of us boxers and even the other clothes in the wardrobe agree. They're just really thoughtless when it comes to their clothes. Oh, well, it's just a fact of life; no point in dwelling on it.

On that day, we had been hidden under a new pair of slacks when we heard her voice. And we were delighted when we were able to catch a glimpse of her. Of course, the man had asked her to turn around before he slipped out of the basted trousers and into the terry robe, so we couldn't see her face, but we could tell from the way she carried herself that this one was different. The man thought and felt differently about her than he did about the other women we'd seen him with. We could tell; we have our ways.

And then, over the past couple of years, we started noticing a lot of changes. At first, we just realized that he wasn't entertaining much any more. As a matter of fact, we'd sometimes go several weeks without being hurriedly removed and thrown across the room. These welcome interludes became more and more common, causing all of us to wonder, somewhat gratefully, what had happened. All of us except "She", that is. She found herself hung at the back of the closet or, more commonly, thrown in a neglected heap in one of its dark corners.

Finally, there were no others. It was only HER voice that we heard, and that voice was nearby more and more often. We could tell that he thought of entertaining her, but for some reason, it never happened. They were together more and more often, though, and we, along with the shirts, slacks, sweats, and the rest, began to speculate about what this could mean.

Then, in a single day just a few months ago, the big change happened. It was a busy day, with a lot of activity. If we'd had the need, we'd have found little opportunity to catch a breath on that day. At one point, the man had even been on horseback, chasing someone across a field. (And let us tell you, we'd be perfectly happy if he NEVER got on the back of a horse again. You have no idea how it feels to be ground into a saddle. All the other slacks and shorts agree with us, except for the jeans, who somehow seem to enjoy it. That's one time the man is welcome to go without us!) Suddenly, all the activity was over. After a hurried car ride and a quick change of clothes, we realized that the man was pacing nervously. Then we heard quiet, beautiful words, spoken by a stranger and repeated, first by the man and then by the woman.

A short time later, the man stood still. Well, not quite still; he was rocking from one foot to the other, even more nervous than he'd been earlier. We heard a door close and then the unmistakable rustle of garments being discarded, but there was something different this time. There was no mad rush; each item was being removed slowly, lovingly, and with great care. His jacket, tie, shirt, shoes, and socks were gone and we were peeking out through the opened zipper of his trousers when we saw her white suit slipping to the floor, accompanied by her soft "Wow!"

"Oh!" the woman said a few moments later, her voice nearly a whisper, and we couldn't have agreed more. Her gentle hands slid us down his long, muscled legs. That's when we knew that something important had changed forever.

Our soft cotton lay on the floor, snuggled against the woman's delicate silk and lace undergarments, and we knew that things back in the dresser drawer would never be the same again.

**The End**